



THE VILLAGE OF ELSAH MUSEUM

Over the years many friends have donated gifts of historical significance to our museum and those gifts have allowed our museum to grow and become an important asset to this community. This issue of *Elsah History* is dedicated to those friends and the Museum they have helped to establish.

Thank you one and all for your generosity and support.

Over the past five years or so we have received gifts from **Gretchen and Roger Batz, Paula and Ned Bradley, Ruth Densmore, Marjorie Doerr, Judith and Glenn Felch, Janet and Dale Gillespey, Jean Heye (via Jane Dunn), Carl Dean Hughes and the family of Reverend Mary Elizabeth Hughes, Gil Ives, Edward and Genie Keller, Al and Inge Mack, Nancy McDow, Louis Noble, Jane Pfeifer, Pauline Bradley Pitchford, Martha Farmer Rifner, Bob Rockabrand, Karen Rohne, Robert Ruland, Mary Anne Schmidt, Helen Sprague, and Jan and Jon Wright.**



In 1999 the museum moved from the old school house to its current location in the Village Hall at 26 LaSalle Street, and is open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. from the first weekend in April through the last weekend in October.

Photo: Inge Mack

Another group of people deserving of our sincere appreciation are the bakers and the buyers who support the Museum's annual bake sale every October. This next October the bake sale will expand into a bake and book sale.

Two major purchases have been made from this fund. The first was a display copy of the World War I Honor Roll. The second was the museum quality mannequin that has been named for Mrs. Ann Shortal who taught at the Elsay School for many years. The mannequin is affectionately called "Miss Annie."



Miss Annie, our very life-like "schoolmarm" brightens up the museum's school exhibit.

Photo: Marie Oleson

The History of the Village of Elsah Museum

By Inge Mack

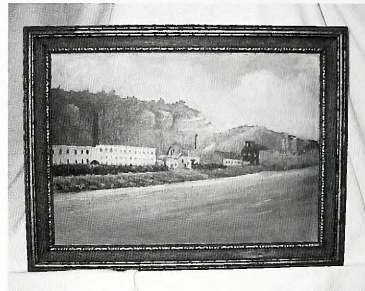
Who has not encountered, while driving through many an old New England village—with its village green and white steeped church—an inviting looking museum—usually housed in a restored historic structure that has been recycled from other uses? Who has not stopped and visited and been met by eager members either of the local government or the community's historical group? These museum staffers are almost always volunteers, helped by young paid attendants, and always excited about the history of their communities and the life there. They embrace you warmly and make you feel at home, make you feel one of them. A Village Museum is a family affair—and so is ours!

As in every case our Village of Elsah Museum started with gifts of wonderfully mixed personal collections. We have geodes and Native American artifacts, both collected locally and displayed by the museum's first director Paul Williams. Another exhibit of Knights of Pythias regalia came from the late Irene Timmermiere, who found the badges at a Jerseyville auction and donated them to Historic Elsah. The Knights at one time owned Farley's Music Hall.

The Dewey McDow World War I army collection includes Dewey's uniform, his army hats, a hand-knitted sweater, his honorable discharge in July of 1919, and his postcards. The postcards were written home, even from Paris, and express his thoughts about the war. Compare this to how today's soldiers "write" home: ephemeral email, which can go global and create international policy havoc, or when not printed upon receipt is lost for family and posterity. What will historians or authors of historic novels have to base their research on without personal accounts?

So... a small personal museum can introduce the viewer to important changes in everyday life, compelling the visitor to make comparisons. The classroom display, complete with Miss Annie, our life-like "schoolmarm," and the desks with their little inkwell holes, can be contrasted to today's classroom where students are hidden behind computers wired to the world.

Or... compare the progress made in refrigerating food in the home. The large ice saw, pike pole and tongs were once needed to fill the village icehouses with Mississippi River ice blocks. The ice was cut, hauled and then packed in sawdust and stored. As you come into Elsah from the River Road you pass a stone ruin on Mill Street that was once one of these ice houses.



Primitive painting of the Elsah waterfront found in the Murphy house after the passing of Eva Murphy.

Donor: Nancy McDow



On the right, a very rare barrel made with vine straps, created by Louis Keller, grandfather of donor, Edward Keller. On the left, an early model washing machine.

Throughout the years the museum has been given many "old-fashioned" tools, small and large: an early wooden washing machine, a carpet beater, a hand plow used by Emmett Murphy in his garden, even a William McDow owned Gaar Scott steam engine given by his daughter Nancy. The engine is currently being stored in the village maintenance building awaiting restoration. See the Gaar Scott article on page 5.



A hand plow used by Emmett Murphy in his garden.
Donor: Nancy McDow

Lately the museum was the happy recipient of material from two creative members of this community who were active in the early 1900s: Mary Elizabeth Hughes, the "Bible Lady," who published and edited *The Liberator*, a periodical that stood for purity and the destruction of saloons and brothels (see *Elsah History* #88); and Frederick Oakes Sylvester, the painter and poet who taught art in St. Louis and was Principia's first art director (see *Frederick Oakes Sylvester: The Artist's Encounter with Elsay*, published in 1986 by HEF). Also recently Edward Keller gave the museum two Keller Store ledgers dating back to 1911, with entries up to 1923.



Photograph of Clement J. Ward who built the Rockabrand house at 56 Mill, and ledger books from the Keller store.
Donor: Edward Keller.

Together with these gifts there have been purchases. The two major ones were a display copy of the World War I Honor Roll and the museum-quality mannequin, the "schoolmarm." The Museum Fund made these acquisitions possible. Money put into

the museum's donation box, and proceeds from the annual Bake Sale go into this fund.

The Village of Elsay Museum has always been a joint venture of the Village Board and Historic Elsay Foundation. As long ago as 1971 the Village Board began to convert the former upper classroom of the old school house into a museum. The first issue of *Elsah History* includes a photo of the mayor, Edward Keller, preparing the walls for painting. The Village budget has continuously paid for utilities, some construction materials and, since 1995, the pay of our young staffers. Prior to 1995 young staffers were paid by HEF.



Photographs of some of Elsay's early residents.

Up until recently, though, attention to the museum has been "on again and off again." It has had to depend on a strong spark of loving interest by an individual who could pull it all together and bring the displays up to a professional level. The first to devote enormous amounts of his time and thought to the installation of exhibits was Paul Williams in 1979 (see *EH* #27). Paul was followed by Glenn Felch, who built on Paul's work and added his own popular graphic architectural "walk through the village" display. Glenn also incorporated new exhibits of the latest donations.

After the Great Flood of 1993, Jane Pfeifer, our mayor at the time, strongly advocated moving the museum out of the old school house into the Village Hall, a larger and pleasantly light space that could easily be

made handicap accessible. The Village offices could then replace the museum area, and records and files would never again be threatened by floodwaters.

The move of the museum was completed in 1999 under the artistic and able direction of both James Schmidt, the new and present director, and Jane Pfeifer, secretary of our Museum Committee. The space was made "museum ready" by the installation of proper lighting devices, a climate control system, excellent darkening shades, and a slight floor panel at the entrance that makes the structure handicap accessible. The latter was indeed an important consideration in the decision to use the old Village Hall as the new museum. Jim and Jane were able "to create a visually inviting space which is also informative." (EH #77-78) With the full support and strong participation of Mayor Marge Doerr, the committee is actively making the museum a living community center.



Elsie's old school building where the village museum was located until its move to the Village Hall in 1999.

Photo: Marie Oleson

The museum now offers annually four special events. It participates in the Illinois statewide Family Heritage Day Community Exhibit, with this year's Elsie theme of "Dolls and Teddy Bears," running from May 1 through June 26, 2005. The Photo Exhibit, open to anyone interested in participating, has a theme of "In and Out, Elsie's Unexpected Treasures." It lasts from July 8 until September 25. Saturday, September 24 is Story Day. And Saturday, October 29 is the Museum Benefit Bake Sale, but this year it will be a Bake and

Book Sale. These are wonderful ways of sharing and mutual learning.



Made by Edward Keller's grandfather, Louis Keller, this 30 inch bowl was used for making bread. The rings form an interesting pattern and show how the bowl was vertically shaped from the trunk of a tree. Donor: Edward Keller

The museum is growing in content and importance and has to be prepared for more possible gift acceptances and for eventual loan requests. The committee drafted and accepted a Loan Policy that covers insurance and other points of concern, and a Deed of Gift, describing among other things the condition of the item donated. The museum is now prepared to do business in the 21st century. Come and sign up to volunteer in whatever way you can, and help it grow.

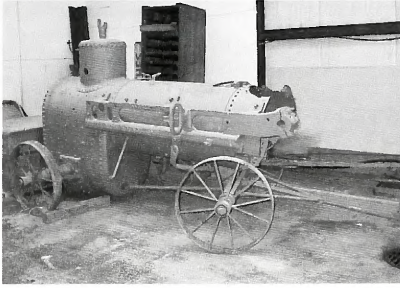
The museum is open from April through October on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is free; donations are gratefully accepted.



The Museum Committee: Mary Anne and Jim Schmidt, Marie Oleson, Jane Pfeifer, Inge Mack, and Marge Doerr. The Museum is jointly maintained by the Village of Elsie and Historic Elsie Foundation.

Photo: David Pfeifer

The Gaar Scott Engine



The Gaar Scott engine as it sits today in the Village of Elsie Maintenance Building awaiting renovation.

Photo: Marie Oleson

In the late nineteenth century, William McDow of Elsie purchased a ten-horse power, Gaar Scott & Co. steam engine for about \$1,000. It was probably used locally to thresh grain and cut lumber. In that era, steam power was a great technological advance from hand work. Now in the early twenty-first century, museums and private individuals own these antique, portable steam engines made by Gaar Scott & Co., in Richmond, Indiana. We have been told that very few of these engines still exist today.

After many years of use, the McDow owned steam engine was stored on a lot near the creek. It was a well-known fixture in Elsie, a tribute to an era passed. However, over time, the fire door, the chimney and various brass parts were removed from the engine. Also, the wood wheels are gone. They were either removed and used elsewhere or deteriorated and were lost at the site.

In 1981, Nancy McDow, granddaughter of William McDow, donated the steam engine to the Village of Elsie. The engine is currently stored in the Village of Elsie Maintenance Building and the Museum has taken on the challenge of bringing the steam engine's history back to life.

The three parts of the engine restoration project are as follows:

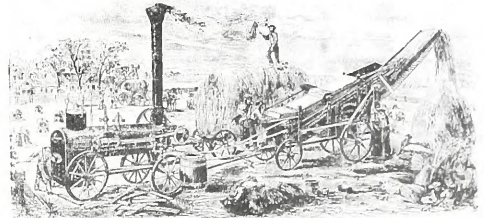
First, develop an educational program about the steam engine.

Second, simultaneously with phase one, raise funds to assemble the engine.

Third, locate and fund a display location.



The Gaar Scott engine exhibit in the museum



GAAR'S STEAM THRESHING MACHINE AT WORK
1864

Post card from Gaar House Museum in Indiana showing steam engine and threshing machine.

Image used with permission



Nancy McDow as a young woman, sitting on her grandfather's Gaar Scott engine.

Museum photo collection

In Remembrance...

This spring Elsay said good-bye to two members of this community, both of whom were held in high regard and with deep affection

James Green passed away in Elsay on March 25th. He had come here in 1941 to fill a temporary opening in Principia College's studio art department. "Temporary" lasted many years.

Jim spent more than 30 years teaching, painting and living on the college campus. He was a familiar figure on Elsay's streets, though, because he brought his students to the village for sketching and painting classes. This is a practice still followed by Prin's art faculty.



Among the many themes his paintings and drawings feature are Elsay, Jersey and Calhoun counties, the river and barge life. Few people knew the visual riches of Elsay and environs as well as he. It can truly be said that Jim Green immortalized the village. Jim also participated in many Elsay events. At last year's HEF art fair, for instance, he donated three paintings for sale to benefit the Foundation.

As retirement drew near, Jim was making plans to live in California where he had been working and enjoying the climate before coming to Elsay. All his friends and colleagues here urged him to reconsider. He did, and upon retiring in 1976, he moved into the house at 15 LaSalle Street. The structure was in a sorry state, but Jim saw its potential to suit his every need. He made significant changes and improvements, even adding a garage. He never tired of saying that he was endlessly grateful that his friends had changed his decision. "I couldn't have had half as happy a retirement anywhere else." His amiable good humor and the beauty he created will surely be missed.

Edith Hammond took her last walk in Elsay on Friday afternoon, April 15th and peacefully passed away on Sunday morning, April 17th. Edith loved Elsay and was a devoted supporter of HEF. By her steady interest and participation in all things, she expanded and enriched everyone's horizon of life's possibilities and she added a gracious rhythm to village life. Edith was born in Denmark in 1909 and came to the United States with her family at the age of three. She moved to Elsay in 1989 to be near her daughter, Jane Hammond Pfeifer, and her family. Edith was regarded by village residents with deep affection, and will long be remembered for her gentle grace. This photograph of Edith on her daily walk was taken by Gretchen Batz, and is entitled "Walk with Love."



We also remember HEF member **Judy Blackburn Williams** who passed away on May 13. Judy lived in Jerseyville but she has always had a deep interest in Elsay. She has been a good friend and supporter of HEF since its inception and has served as a member of the Museum Committee. Her husband, John Williams, is a former president of HEF.

Village Happenings...

•**Alley Ringhausen, Executive Director of the Great Rivers Land Trust** spoke to villagers last February in Farley's Music Hall. Great Rivers Land Trust is a non-profit organization and its mission is to "promote the preservation and improvement of natural resources principally in, but not limited to, the watershed of the Mississippi River for the benefit of the general public. These resources shall include: land and water resources, the plant and animal life thereon, and the area's unique scenic, natural, and historic sites." GRLT is one of the largest landowners along the River Road between Alton and Grafton.

GRLT is also restoring and maintaining Riverview House, the oldest house in Elsah.



Alley Ringhausen shares information on the work and mission of the Great Rivers Land Trust.

•**Election Day for Village Officers was Tuesday, April 5.** Incumbents who were reelected are **Marge Doerr**, Mayor, **Jeralyn Lewitz**, Clerk, and **Ed Lewitz**, Trustee. **Ann Modak** (recently changed from Mordock) was newly elected to the Board of Trustees. **Debbie Flatley** has since been appointed as a Trustee to fill a vacancy. **Linda Bohaker** remains as Treasurer. Other Board members are **Mark Badasch**, **Merlin Lewis**, and **Lynn Schreiber**.

Zoning Board members are **Eric Schreiber**, chair, **Paula Bradley**, **Norman Brokaw**, **Cy Bunting** (alternate), **Bill Flatley**, **Edith List**, **Inge Mack**, and **Sandra Stack**.

Much appreciation is due all these folks who serve Elsah so well.

•**A new book: Bernard Maybeck at Principia College: The Art and Craft of Building**, written by noted Maybeck expert **Robert M. Craig**, has recently been published by Gibbs Smith of Salt Lake City. This beautiful 514 page book is an exhaustive study of architect Bernard Maybeck's career and of his decade and a half association with The Principia. The book contains hundreds of color photos, drawings, and illustrations and is dedicated to the memory of Elsah's own Dr. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. HEF Board member and Principia College archivist, Jane Pfeifer, worked closely with Dr. Craig on this project.

Dr. Craig notes in his book how Mr. Maybeck came to design and help build the gas station for the Spatz brothers on LaSalle Street in 1931. The building was designed to blend in with the nineteenth-century wood and stone structures of the village. The building has since been used as an art gallery and is now the Christian Science Reading Room.

•**Jane Pfeifer** is now making regular trips to California where she has been appointed to the Board of the Friends of First Church of Christ, Scientist, Berkeley, a Bernard Maybeck designed building which is a National Historic Landmark. The purpose of the Friends organization is to help maintain and preserve this incredible structure.

•**An exhibit - The Great River: Frederick Oakes Sylvester in St. Louis** will feature the paintings of the Poet-Painter of the Upper Mississippi Valley. Sylvester was a well known local artist and director of the art program at The Principia from 1902 until his passing in 1915. The exhibit is open May 28-September 3, Tuesday through Saturday at The Sheldon Art Galleries, 3648 Washington Boulevard, St. Louis. Hours: Tuesday and Thursday-Noon to 8 pm; Wednesday and Friday-Noon to 5 pm; Saturday-10 am to 2 p.m.

•**Daniel Keller book:** HEF member, Daniel Keller, French by birth, but currently living in England has sent us a book (written in French) telling the story of the Keller family and their life in France before their emigration to America (and to Elsah) in the 1850s.

Upcoming Activities in the Village of Elsayh...

Game night — pot luck supper, \$1.00/person
Second Saturday of each month
6:00 p.m. Civic Center

Folk dances — All are welcome, \$5 per person;
\$15 max per family, student, half-price with ID
Saturdays, Sept 17, Oct 15, Nov 19
7:30 p.m. Farley's Music Hall

Trivia nights — family fun and HEF fund raiser.
Reservations required (374-1213) for tables of from
4 to 8. \$10 per person includes snacks
Saturdays Sept 24, Oct 22, Nov 12
7:30 p.m. Farley's Music Hall

Quilt Show — exhibit of local quilts
Wed thru Sat, Sept 21 thru 24 -- \$2.00 per person
1:00 to 4:00 Farley's Music Hall

Museum: Special exhibits / events for 2005
May 1 to June 26:

Family Heritage: Dolls and Teddy Bears

July 1:

Deadline for submitting photographs for
photo contest. The theme is...

In and Out: Elsayh's Unexpected Treasures

July 8 to September 25:

Photography exhibit

September 24:

Story Day

October 29:

Annual Museum Benefit: Bake and Book Sale

Museum open — through October 30

1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Friday thru-Sunday,
Located in the Village Hall, 26 LaSalle Street

Welcome...

- ...to Gerald and Char Becker—128 Cemetery Road (who have returned after a brief absence)
- ...to Joy and Tim Booth — 27 Mill Street (the Wanamaker House)
- ...to Nancy and Bill Killion — 2 Maple Street (who have returned after a brief absence)
- ...to Jean Kistler — 18A LaSalle Street (the apartment above My Just Desserts)
- ...to Shannon and Nathan Robertson — 2 Alpa Street (apartment below Jeremiah's — Elsayh)
- ...to Charlene Wedding — 12 LaSalle Street (now living with her daughter, Ellen Hanold)

and Farewell...

- ...to Kim and Sam Crocker — 15 Mill Street / Green Tree Inn (now in Alton)
- ...to Whitney Howland — 2 Alpa Street (now on Principia Campus)
- ...to Ruth Jones — 18A LaSalle Street (newly married and in South Carolina)
- ...to Renee and Mathew McCreary — 2 Maple Street
- ...to Stacie, Dan, and Emma Schaefer — 27 Mill Street (now in Sand Point, Idaho)
- ...to Kim and Shawn Sherman — 128 Cemetery Road

Welcome to new members of HEF:

Minnie and Delmar Dooley and Ute Schweitzer Levi

Historic Elsayh Foundation Board:

President Marie Oleson
Vice President Inge Mack
Secretary Carol Stookey
Treasurer Tim Tomlinson

Board members:

Ann Badasch Mary Anne Schmidt
Paula Bradley Jeanne Shultz
Jeralyn Lewitz Gerald Taetz
Jane Pfeifer Susan Young
Board Member Emerita: Marie Cresswell

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P.O. Box 117, Elsayh, IL 62028

The purposes of Historic Elsayh Foundation are stated in the Articles of Incorporation (1971):

"...the preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, houses, architecture and culture of the Village of Elsayh, Illinois, the historic areas, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and periodicals regarding the Village, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and educational value of the Village."